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Interview with Abilio Araujo, Member of the Central Committee of FRETILIN and Minister of State for Economic and Social Affairs of the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF EAST TIMOR

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Question:
Can you give a general evaluation of the current situation of the struggle of the East Timorese people in the military, economic and political fields?

Abilio:
The struggle of the people of East Timor against the Indonesian occupation forces still continues. However, due to the specific conditions of our struggle, the struggle has entered into a new phase. These conditions are: total self-reliance as a result of the total blockade the island has been subjected to during the last four years, and the capacity of our enemy to renew its material equipment and troops. Our armed forces still carry out military operations, but on a smaller scale than in previous years. There is much more mobility in the guerilla activities, in the sense that they have to combine small military offensives, as tactical offensives, with the underground work (underground resistance) now being developed in the Indonesian controlled areas. Taking into account these militray operations of our armed forces as well as our political re-organization, due to the betrayals and due to our dismantling of our old-style army - because this army came from the colonial army - we can conclude that there were some setbacks in terms of our resistance. But, on the other hand, our struggle has taken a qualitative leap, that is, we have gained the understanding that this struggle must take other forms, which is in effect the implementation of the decisions already taken by the Central Committee of FRETILIN in 1977. These decisions were: 1) our struggle is a people's war, 2) this war is a protracted war, and 3) in this struggle, we have to rely mainly on our own forces. Based on what I've said already, we can say that the Indonesians have succeeded in controlling the most vital areas of Timor and that, because they are backed by a very big military

power, they are able to go everywhere, mainly by using air transportation means, such as helicopters, etc.
In the diplomatic field, we succeeded last week in having a resolution approved by the United Nations. But we are very much concerned really, in regard to some Western countries like Belgium, France and others in the Common Market, that intend to take a position of recognizing the Indonesian take-over of East Timor. Up until now it hasn't happened, but we are very worried that it might happen next year or sometime in the future. In order to try and prevent such a development, we are also carrying out our offensives in the diplomatic field.

Question:
Can you say something about why the situation has changed, why the Indonesian army controlls most parts of East Timor, because 2 years ago you said that 80% of the country was controlled by the liberation forces and they were operating up to a few kilometres away from the capital city. What, in your opinion, has happened since that time, that the FRETILIN has had to retreat, to withdraw from some regions?

Abilio:
The situation on the battlefield has changed mainly due to weaknesses in our organization. I say weaknesses, because of the historical develpment of FRETILIN as a front. In a very short time, it had to develop very quickly. We were also forced - in a very short time - to face tremendous offensives from the imperialist forces represented by Indonesia. So, of course, the organization grew very quickly, but it lacked in many respects a sound ideological basis. I refer mainly to the leadership of the Central Committee of FRETILIN, I refer to our army. In the beginning, some sectors thought the war would be ended very quickly and so wrong ideas were spread inside the organization, which also had their effects in the army. The army itself originated from the colonial army and it had a different understanding of the role of the army. That's why, during this period, some elements thought that the war material, that is, the material equipment, would be the decisive factor for the victory in this struggle. But in fact, in the last 2, 3, 4 years, nothing has come in from outside. They thought immediately that the war, the resistance, was not possible and would not be victorious. As a result, many of these people surrendered. And of course we can say that this weakened our resistance. This situation left many empty spaces in many regions, into which the Indonesian forces were able to penetrate. The creation of a situation such as this, in which civilians as well as military commanders and soldiers surrendered, also shows

how we waged war in this period: expecting alot of material from outside - the army often fought a classical war, a war of positions. Due to our own specific conditions, as I said in the beginning, we could not continue this type of war - mainly a defensive war. The Indonesians could send thousands and thousands of soldiers to fight and when they launched their big campaigns of encirclement and annihilation at the end of 1977, beginning of 1978, these big offensives caused considerable setbacks in the defense of our country. At the same time, also during the period end of 1977 beginning of 1978, our enemy, the Indonesian expansionist regime, tried to weaken our organization from the inside, mainly the leadership - the Central Committee of FRETILIN - by making dangerous proposals of solutions of compromise and negotiations. And many weak elements started to think that by taking a position of compromise with Indonesia, the war would be ended very quickly. This position inside the Central Committee of FRETILIN was confronted with another position: to never accept any solution of compromise. We can consider the defeat of the Xavier-line - he was the President of FRETILIN - at the end of 1977, as a purification within FRETILIN. At the end of 1978 the same thing happened with the betrayal of Alarico Fernandes, Minister of Information and Security. His betrayal had a direct effect on our organization, because he opposed the revolutionary line, headed by our comrade, Nicolau Lobato. Fernandes surrendered to the Indonesian army, he provided very important information about our armed organization and succeeded in giving the Indonesians the information they needed to carry out their plot to kill our President. So we can say that during this period many things happened, which led to some very big setbacks. That's why we can understand that the situation now is rather difficult. We cannot compare it to last year or to two years ago. But on the other hand, I want to stress, that in the whole course of this struggle the revolutionary line was always victorious. This has been demonstrated by the expulsion of Xavier do Amaral, the betrayal and later also the expulsion of Alarico Fernandes, and the determination to continue the struggle based on self-reliance. This means that we are already sure that in this war we must rely on our own forces, regarless of the difficulties, regardless of the protracted nature of this war...So, by having this conception and by applying it in practice, our organization has already taken a very big step. From a core of the organization, we will re-start and continue the struggle in new ways and the rebuilding of our political organization, FRETILIN, as well as that of FALINTIL, will take on new forms.

Question:
You speak about a new phase and new forms. What will these be like compared to the old ones?

Abilio:
New forms refer to how the struggle is being waged. It is necessary now and in the coming future to combine the resistance in the cities, in the areas occupied by Indonesia, with the military armed struggle. We must combine the peasant's movement with the movements of the workers and other sectors of our society, represented mainly in the cities - that's what I mean. How can we organize strikes, how can we organize a cultural movement and a cultural resistance, this is what I consider as new forms of the struggle. Besides this, the classical warfare, or war of positions, which had been the main principle of struggle in the past, has changed to the tactic of mobile warfare, carried out by small groups of guerilla fighters: 4 or 5 fighters in one section, sometimes 9. These small offensives-tactical offensives-are in fact also new forms of struggle.

Question:
In Western newspapers and in publications of leftist movements, too, during the last year we read about starvation in East Timor. Can you tell us something about the economical and social situation of the East Timorese people at this moment?

Abilio:
The social and economic situation of the East Timorese people now is also very difficult. I refer mainly to the population living in Indonesian controlled areas. In fact, there are now many people in the Indonesian controlled areas, mainly in the "strategic areas". Starvation has occurred for two main reasons:

1) the massive saturation bombing of the food production, the use of napalm and bacteriological and chemical weapons.
2) the displacement of the peasants, who are forced to come down from the mountains to live in the "strategic villages". They are not allowed to go back to work. They are sitting there and the Indonesian army administration is not able to provide them with food. This situation has been confirmed by a Catholic priest, who came from East Timor last June - he had been living in the mountains with FRETILIN until the end of last year. (end of 1978)

Therefore, I want to say that the Indonesian army destroyed our national economy. If it is correct, what some technicians have said, that by the continued use of napalm, etc. in Timor, the production capacity of the land will be even less, then we can expect that within 5, 6, or 7 years, the land in East Timor will not be productive any more.

That's why I want to denounce the Indonesian authorities and the facist regime of Indonesia by saying that the starvation is not the result of Portuguese colonialism, which dominated the East Timorese people for over 400 years. Even during the last decade of Portuguese colonialism , starvation had not reached the proportions it has now reached in East Timor. The starvation we are now witnessing is a result mainly of the bombing over the past years. The Indonesians also claim that FRETILIN is responsible for the starvation, they claim to be carrying out projects of national reconstruction and development, etc. But this is completely false. Everyone knows, journalists and others who were in East Timor during the period of FRETILIN control , that at that time FRETILIN was carrying out projects of development and that the people were not starving.

The problem of starvation in East Timor at this moment is in fact a serious problem. We should concern ourselves with stopping it and seeing how to avoid it in the future. But the point is, that we should recognize the real cause of this starvation. There are some organizations as well as some governments, which want to send food to Timor now, to start relief projects, health projects, etc. We think that the best and still the only way to support the East Timorese people is to denounce the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, which is the political cause of the starvation. As I have had the opportunity to tell some politicians and governments of Western countries, Indonesia is in fact happy to see that the international public opinion is now more concerned, more worried about the humanitarian problem and not about the political problem. This is just what the Indonesians want: to deviate attention away from the main cause, the political cause. And so, next year or in years to come, the people who now are intending to send food and relief-aid to Timor will no longer think about the political side of the problems concerning East Timor.

Question:
Concerning supplies or any other form of support for East Timor: are there any countries or international organizations that are supporting in any way the struggle of the East Timorese people?

Abilio:
At this moment the majority of the African countries and Asian countries, except for those which are allies of Indonesia (the ASEAN countries), are supporting us diplomatically. For instance, the resolution, which was approved this year in the United Nations was approved by 61 votes for, 31 against and 44 abstentions. But about supplies to East Timor, I want to say that we haven't received a single bullet, any medicine or any clothing whatsoever from outside since Indonesia invaded our country. But in the diplomatic field, there are many organizations and governments which still support us.

Question:
What about the attitude of the government of our country (Federal Republic of Germany) toward this conflict?

Abilio:
The West German government has abstained in the United Nations on the problem of East Timor from 1976 to 1979. What we know is that they are now trying to find a way to recognize the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. I want to stress that the abstention of the German government can be seen more as a tendency to support Indonesia than to support the right of self-determination of the East Timorese people, because all during this period they have continued to support the Indonesian government militarily, economically and financially. In 1976 the Central Committee of FRETILIN made an appeal to all parliaments and governments of the world to cease all economical, political and financial aid to the Suharto regime. But, as far as we know, the imperialist and capitalist countries of Europe and America continue to have their economic links with Indonesia. They are seeking a justification for recognition (of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor) in the future. But, of course, we continue to struggle and we believe that no matter if the governments recognize the Indonesian take-over or not, everything will depend on the fighting and on the struggle of our people. The governments which support Indonesia can decide many things, but the one who will have the final say will be the East Timorese people themselves.

Question:
Concerning the organizing of solidartiy work: you know the situation in Europe quite well and you know that it is especially difficult to organize a solidarity movement for a liberation front in Asia, because many people are frustrated. The Chinese have over-run Vietnam, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia - everything in the name of socialism. What do you think about organizing a solidarity movement here for East Timor in light of this new development? How can we find a new form and a new content for our solidarity work?

Abilio:
First of all, the contradiction between the oppressed classes and oppressed nations on the one side, and the imperialist and capitalist system on the other, still exists. That's why I have to say that the revolutionary struggle is always possible and has been going on the whole time in our century up to the present. In my opinion, the solidarity movement throughout the world should continue to support these revolutionary struggles. Of course, I understand and know that there are certain attitudes prevalent among the different movements in the solidarity front, since the events in South-East-Asia took place, namely, the problems between

China and Vietnam, between Vietnam and Cambodia. In our opinion - now I am addressing all friends and sympathizers of the liberation movements in the Third World countries - these are in fact negative experiences, but we should learn from these negative experiences by continuing the solidarity work, because there is still fighting, there are still just and revolutionary struggles throughout the world: in East Timor, in Thailand, in the Phillippines, South Africa, Latin America, Europe, etc. What we should see is that by drawing on the experiences of the solidarity work in the past, we should rectify this work. From my experience in contacting sdidarity movements throughout Europe and America, I have found that there are many good people, friends, comrades, who, in supporting a liberation struggle, don't try to gain a deeper knowledge of the revolutionary process taking place in a given country. For instance, there are people who support our struggle, because our struggle is just, because we are fighting against a lackey of US imperialism. Of course, because of the nature of our struggle, our struggle is just, but it is necessary to know what process is taking place in our country. FRETILIN is always open to discuss with our friends throughout the world concerning what we are doing and we welcome contributions in any form, but if the solidarity movement does not study in detail, making a class analysis of a society at a given stage, if the solidarity movement does not see the stages of the struggle, the steps of the struggle in long term, it cannot account for the strategic aim of one revolutionary struggle and many people can become frustrated when something happens which they didn't foresee or didn't think would happen. To sum up the main points:

1) The solidarity movement should continue, because the contradictions in the world still exist. Because these contradictions still exist, the revolutionary struggles are necessary and unavoidable.

2) Although there were some negative experiences in the solidarity work in the past, this work should not be stopped. On the contrary, the solidarity movement should study again what is the correct way to support the revolutionary movements. This is what I think our friends should think about.